

Chief Matenge Comes Back

A week later, a day came that the people of Golema Mmidi never forgot.

Chief Matenge had left hospital in the middle of August. When he came back to Golema Mmidi, he was terribly angry. All the villagers were busy – making storage holes for water and building drying sheds for tobacco. The villagers had gone too far. In the past, the villagers had asked permission before

60



'Why are you crying now I am here?'

doing anything. And Matenge had made them pay for it! Now they had plans for selling meat and growing cash-crops to make money for themselves.

Matenge sat at home planning revenge⁴¹. He sent his servants to find out what was happening in the village. He heard the name of Paulina Sebeso again and again.

In the morning of that day, Paulina woke Makhaya as usual. Gilbert walked into the yard and he and Makhaya walked off together to the farm. A little later, Paulina saw someone sitting outside her yard. It was one of Matenge's servants. He was dirty and dressed in rags. Paulina was worried, but she spoke to him politely.

'Good day, friend. What do you want?' she said.

'Matenge has sent me. You must come at once.'

'Me?' Paulina cried. 'But what have I done?'

'You know what you have done wrong,' the servant answered. 'I've been sent to tell you to come.' And he walked away, laughing.

Paulina was very worried. If Matenge sent for anyone, it always meant trouble.

That day, the women were coming to pick the tobacco. Paulina was waiting for the women to arrive. When her friends arrived, they told Paulina they would go with her. On the way, they met Maria, Dinorego and Mma-Millipede. They all went together to the house of Chief Matenge.

The news went from hut to hut. Soon all the men and women of the village were with them. They all walked together to Matenge's house.

The villagers knew that in the past Matenge had taken land and money from them. But he was their chief and they did not want to harm him. Now however, things had changed. They

62

were learning to work together for themselves. So they decided that they would go together to talk to Matenge.

And so, laughing and talking, all the people of Golema Mmidi met at the centre of the village. Only Gilbert and Makhaya were not there.

When Chief Matenge saw the crowd coming into his yard, he was afraid. This had never happened before. He ran back into his house, shaking with fear. He began to shut all the doors and windows. All his servants ran out of the house and hid in the bush.

Now Matenge was alone in the dark, silent house. He looked out of a window and saw all the villagers sitting on the ground. They were looking at the house, waiting quietly for Matenge to come out.

But Matenge was too afraid to leave the house. The people of Golema Mmidi had never done anything like this before. Tears of anger began to run down Matenge's face. All his life, Matenge had been greedy and cruel. He wanted to keep the people of Golema Mmidi poor and unhappy. Now, without saying a word, they were taking their revenge against him.

The villagers sat in silence. They were so quiet that vultures began flying over the village. Gilbert and Makhaya were working on the cattle-ranch. They saw the birds in the sky. They got into the Land Rover and drove through the empty village.

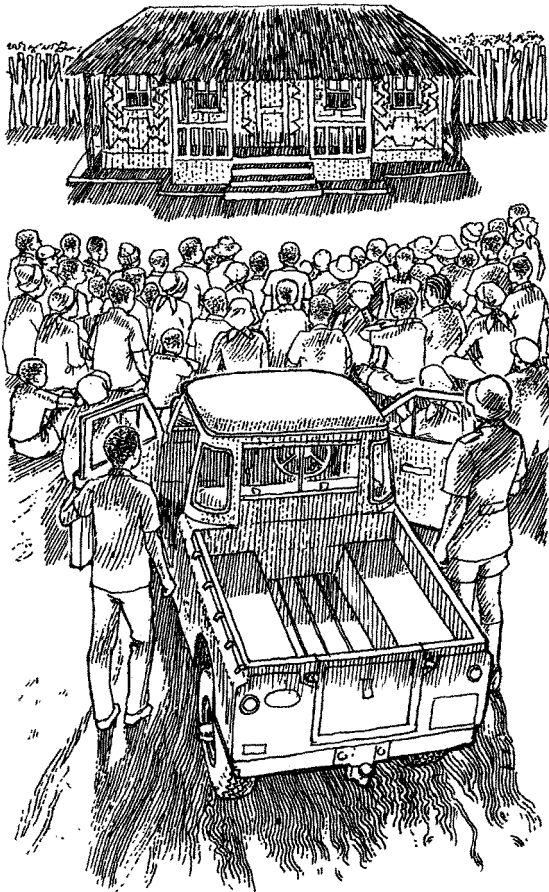
When the Land Rover reached Matenge's yard, all the villagers turned round. They said nothing. Then they turned back to look again at the silent house.

'What's happening here?' Makhaya said at last.

'We're waiting for the Chief to come out, son,' Dinorego replied without turning round.

How long has this been going on? Makhaya thought.

63



'What's happening here?'

He began to walk towards the house. Slowly, he walked up the steps. He stood for a moment in silence. Then with a crash, Makhaya broke down the door.

The villagers stood up and began to walk quietly up the steps. They stood round the broken door, and gasped⁴² at what they saw. The dead body of their Chief was hanging from a rope!

Makhaya was phoning George Appleby-Smith.

'I'll be there in ten minutes,' George said.

George picked up the phone in his office again. He had to speak to Paramount Chief Sekoto.

'Your brother's just killed himself. Yes, in his own house,' George said.

There was a gasp.

'I'll be there as soon as possible,' Chief Sekoto said.

What trouble! Sekoto thought. Matenge makes trouble even when he is dead.

'My brother's just died of a heart attack,' Chief Sekoto told his wife. He told everyone the same story. Chief Sekoto knew that people would believe his story because they wanted to. A chief did not kill himself.

The villagers were waiting in Matenge's yard when Chief Sekoto and George Appleby-Smith arrived. Chief Sekoto could not believe what had happened.

'Why did all these people come here?' the Paramount Chief asked.

'Their cattle are dying,' George said.

'I don't understand. Did my brother kill himself because cattle are dying?'

'A week ago,' George said, 'we found a dead child at a cattle-post. He had starved to death. Today, your brother sent

65

for the child's mother. The people came with her to support her. That's all.'

Sekoto said nothing. He watched his men carry his brother's body out of the house.

The people of Golema Mmidi began to go home. They did not know what to think. But they knew that they were now free.

13

Starting Again

For the rest of that day, the villagers of Golema Mmidi sat together. They talked about the drought, but all the time they were thinking of Matenge.

Gilbert was thinking about Matenge, too. Before coming to Golema Mmidi, Gilbert had thought that only white men harmed the people of Africa. He had not thought that an African would steal from other Africans.

Makhaya, too, was thinking about Matenge. He had once thought of killing him. But the people of Golema Mmidi had changed things forever.

The two young men had worked hard to bring changes to Golema Mmidi. Suddenly they knew that they had won the fight.

And now there were changes coming for Makhaya too. He had fought for freedom. But now he had other things to think about. Paulina, a family, and his future life in Golema Mmidi.

Makhaya walked slowly along the path and stopped to

watch the sunset. As she was making supper, Paulina heard his footsteps. Makhaya was coming home.

Paulina said, 'Will you have some food?'

Makhaya smiled at her. Paulina was the best woman he had ever known. She was brave and honest.

'So many things have happened so quickly,' Makhaya said. 'I forgot to ask you if you would marry me. Will you, Paulie?'

Paulina quickly said "yes". But she could not believe what had happened. Everything was different now. They all had to start their lives again, from the beginning.

66

67